

Marching the nation: an essay on the mobility of belonging among militant youngsters in Côte d'Ivoire

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This programmatic paper seeks to develop a new perspective on the military-political identity and performance of militias particularly in urban environments. The militia under consideration is the Groupement Patriotique pour la Paix (GPP), one of the oldest and most prominent of the southern militias. The GPP came into being as a civil society initiative in the aftermath of the September 2002 insurgency in Côte d'Ivoire a country which since then has lingered in a no-peace-no-war situation. The new perspective, here called 'ludus pro patria', looks at how the militias' activity, organisation, and discourse is deployed in the urban public sphere and to what effect. Within the scope of this paper, this perspective serves to deconstruct the alleged process of 'militianisation' as the combined effect of discursive appropriation and concrete insinuation of a subaltern youth initiative by national elites and international actors. In conclusion, this paper argues that the proposed approach is essential for a proper understanding of two main dimensions of the militias' *raison d'être* and *modus operandi*: mobility and belonging.

Key words: Côte d'Ivoire, groupement patriotique pour la paix, militias, public sphere, governance.

Opening move

"Au commencement, il y avait des refrains sonores. Des hymnes à la patrie scandés, clamés, chantés en chœur le long des principales artères de la cité: 'On a été formés pour arrêter assaillants... tuer assaillants...' (Toha 2006).

In the winter of 2008, in the course of a visit to the citadel of Namur (Belgium), I walked into a sports stadium which had the motto 'Ludus pro patria' inscribed on top of its grandstand. The combination was odd. The immense athletic track, officially designated as the 'games stadium' (*stade des jeux*) is part of an age-old military site and makes reference to the nation-state in a monumental fashion. Looking deeper into the history of the citadel stadium and its late 19th century context – the booming of sports as "plai-

sirs et techniques de soi” (Foucault 1983) and the reinvention of Olympic Games with its ambivalent, nationalist cum imperialist overtones (Hobsbawm 1983, 1987; Merkel 2002, 2003; Weber s.d.) – it became clear that the figure of ‘ludus pro patria’ had the potential of a powerful heuristic tool.

Soon after this visit to Namur, I embarked on a research project which deals with urban (southern) youth militias in Côte d’Ivoire, in particular the *Groupeement Patriotique pour la Paix* (GPP) which emerged in the aftermath of the September 2002 insurgency. The latter began with army rebels occupying the northern part of the country and is supposed to end with the presidential elections expected to be held in a reunified Côte d’Ivoire by the end of 2008. Throughout this six year period, militias have been relatively active in Abidjan, as well as in secondary towns and large sections of the rural areas in the southern government-held part of the country. The urban militia research project continues my earlier research on the Ivorian student movement of the 1990s. The student union FESCI arguably served as a model for, and has provided strategies and personnel to the dozens of patriotic youth organisations which have thrived over the last six years. This so-called ‘patriotic galaxy’ presents itself as a many-headed civil society movement which counteracts rebel activity in defensive and offensive ways: through sensitization and mobilisation, with a mixture of words and other, more violent forms of action. Apart from the trade unions and the many people’s parliaments (see Bahi 2004, Banégas 2007, Atchoua 2008), the ‘galaxy’ includes organisations that are habitually called militias and which in the quote at top of this section are described as chanting and marching along Abidjan’s arterial roads.¹

The ‘patria’ of the early 20th century evoked in Namur was a more or less stable version of a Westphalian state structure. One century later and in stark contrast, the parading militias of Abidjan, operate in a Côte d’Ivoire that is in a state of turmoil, and, according to more than one observer, engaged in a process of reinvention. This paper indeed situates the phenomenon of militias against the background of the no-peace-no-war situation in which the Ivorian state finds itself.² More particularly it addresses the phenomenon of ‘milicianisation’ which in the context of Côte d’Ivoire (Banégas 2008; Chauveau 2008) and other African countries (Marchal & Messiant 1997; Ngodi 2006) is seen as accompanying processes of state failure; more particularly as a top-down process of delegation of violence in a process of state disintegration. In contrast, this paper suggests that ‘milicianisation’ in urban Côte d’Ivoire is the contingent outcome of a complex process whereby the appropriation and reorientation of a subaltern youth initiative by national elites, politicians, etc. as well the imposition of transnational discourses of conflict analysis and conflict resolution, play an important part. Of course, the GPP is not a passive victim in this process. It endorsed this evolution (a) by the way in which it presented and represented itself in the urban public sphere during the early stages of the conflict and (b) by seizing the financial, training or job opportunities which the ‘milicianisation’

1 The urban militia project referred to here is conducted within the framework of the EU-funded MICROCON project, more particularly as part of Work Package 10 ‘Governance and Institutions’.

2 For more on the concept of no-war-no-peace, see Arnaut & Højbjerg (2008).

promises to offer for the GPP members in national and transnational programmes of demobilisation and reintegration. While the second reason for the gradual redefinition of the GPP as a militia can be easily inferred from interviews and observations, the first phenomenon requires further explanation, in particular by looking at the GPP from a 'ludus pro patria' perspective.

In order to initiate this perspective, it will be useful to round out the above narrative of the methodological dimension of this paper by pointing to two further links between 'Namur' and 'Abidjan,' firstly a well-known article and, secondly, an early encounter in the field.

The article in question is written by Yacouba Konaté in 2003 and speaks about the members of the patriotic youth movement, its thugs and its orators, as well as about its predecessor, the student union FESCI, as "les enfants de la balle". The latter expression is surely multilayered but it basically forges a 'ludus pro patria' kind of combination in which the leisure of ball-playing or more generally youth entertainment is seen alongside the serious business of 'bullets' signifying the militarization of youngsters in appearance, tactics, and in violent action.

The second link is an encounter which I had in March 2008 with *Angénor Drogban*.³ *Angénor* is a sports teacher at the Lycée Municipal of an important Abidjan commune but also holds a degree in information technology and is a part-time self-employed ICT consultant. Although he is not a public figure and has never been reported overtly demonstrating his authority in the organisations in which he was active, *Angénor* may be considered as one of Côte d'Ivoire's key-actors when it comes to youth movements of the last two decades. In the early months of 1990 he was involved in the birth of the student union FESCI and in late 2002, he was one of the founding fathers of the GPP which soon became Abidjan's most well-known urban militia. During one of the first conversations I had with *Angénor*, he took stock of five years of militia activity and readily evoked the figure of 'ludus pro patria' by arguing that the GPP had enjoyed a double success. Not only had its military activity in support of the loyalist army forces, been important, he said, but also its physical, athletic presence in the urban public space. The latter is something which a friend of *Angénor*'s and GPP general *Sancho* identified as 'le pas-gym', a term most probably derived from 'pas de gymnastique'—the typical army drill exercise which consist of marching or running in line while chanting in call-and-response style.

A public sphere perspective on militias

"Never since the days of Chivalry has Sport played so large a part in the preparation for war as it plays to-day" (*Revue Olympique* 1902).

This paper looks at urban militias through the prism of 'ludus pro patria'. Moreover, by discerning in the southern Ivorian militias a seemingly paradoxical constellation of guns and gaming, arms and athletics, the 'ludus pro patria' matrix leads us to reflect

3 Like the other names of militiamen and women whom I quote in this text, *Angénor Drogban* is a pseudonym. In the text pseudonyms are always put in italics.

on two entangled issues: the mobility of the militiamen and women both in physical and in socio-economic terms (Debos 2008), and their quest for belonging which is most often articulated in a nationalistic, jingoistic idiom but ought perhaps to be understood as multilayered and pertaining to public and private aspects of political, economic, and social citizenship (Kalyvas 2003; Englund 2005). The programmatic nature of this paper should be clear and its exploratory character makes it at times resemble an essay more than a scholarly paper, both in terms of empirical grounding and in analytical conceptualisation. In connection with the former, this paper has no comparative ambitions and therefore does not try to confront its data with other phenomena of 'playful armies' such as the Herero Truppspieler (Werner 1990) or the Swahili Beni Ngoma (Ranger 1975) let alone with the many forms of 'armoured' civil society, vigilante and paramilitary organisation. The analytical scheme underlying this paper is based on emerging insights in the anthropology of the state which combines (a) a performative perspective on practices and discourses of governance, politics, and state-formation (Ferguson & Gupta 2002), as much as (b) the recognition of the 'power' of performance', or the fact that public representations of power are inherent to their deployment (Mbembe 1992; Askew 2002).

The point of entry into the 'ludus pro patria' perspective is the idea that, as the quote at the opening of this section indicates, there is a fine line between sports and athletics on the one hand and military training and activity on the other hand. Moreover, the historiographical and anthropological literature bears out how effectively militaro-athletic performances have been in group formation, identity contests and counterhegemonic tug-of-war (Ranger 1975; Hobsbawm 1983, 1987; Merkel 2002, 2003). Such observations find support in the anthropological literature that is seeking to considerably enlarge the field of political expressions and performances (e.g. Mbembe & Roitman 1997; Bayart 1992; Martin 2002; Kaarsholm & James 2000) and in the politological literature which offers a performative understanding of political participation (Kulynych 1997). Looking at militiamen and women as actors in the public sphere seeking among other things economic and political participation, implies perceiving their organisations as, in the words of David Apter (1993: 30), emancipatory movements, and their actions as inversionary discourse in which violence (in the widest possible sense of the word) is "the ultimate symbolic expression, the social text, the beginning rather than the end of discourse" (see also Hoffman 2006 Schlichte 2005: 26-27). Finally, the 'ludus pro patria' perspective situates the performances of participation within an enlarged concept of public sphere – enlarged in the sense that it is sensitive to power plays (Ladrière 1992; Fraser 1993; Dahou 2005), as well as to its materiality. The material nature of the public sphere comprises at least two important dimensions: its spatiality and bodiliness (Smith & Low 2006; Harvey 2006; Diouf 2003; Durham 2005; Durham & Klaitz 2002; Hoffman 2007).

While the analytical model outlined above requires to be refined and further elaborated, the 'ludus pro patria' approach can, within the scope of this paper, be restricted to a 'public sphere' perspective on militias because of its focus on the way the GPP (a) needs to be situated within a history of 'armoured' civil-society initiatives by youngsters and students which goes back at least as far as 1990, and (b) played out its militant nature in

the urban public space in its early stages – that is before its detrimental ‘militianisation’. These two foci are the subject matter of the next two sections. The first one tells the story of Angénor’s militancy from 1990 to 2002 which results in the creation of the GPP, and is followed by a reconstruction of the short history of the GPP in which attention is drawn to the way the urban militia is constituted by the distribution of ‘bodies’ in urban space.⁴

Angénor Drogban and his ‘old boys’ network (1990-2002)

“Premier objectif [du GPP]: [...] il fallait apprendre aux gens de résister, comment résister selon les pratiques, ça peut être des pratiques mystiques, des pratiques physiques” (Angénor Drogban 21-03-2008).

In early 1990, Angénor, a student at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* of Abidjan, joins the FESCI, then led by Ahipeaud Martial, and immediately enters its highest executive stratum, the *Bureau Exécutif National* (BEN). There Angénor is deputy at the department of information while working closely together with the department of organization where Charles Groguhet and Touré Moussa Zéguen hold leading positions. In 1993 Angénor leaves the university as well as the FESCI, and takes a job as sports teacher in the small town of Aboisso, before returning to Abidjan in 1998 where he takes the same job at a *Lycée Municipal*. In the meantime several of his erstwhile age-mates at the FESCI have left the country: Ahipeaud and Zéguen are both in England while Groguhet lives in Germany.⁵ However, successive radical turns in the political and military situation in Côte d’Ivoire will make them return. After the coup d’état of December 1999 when General Guéï takes over power, Ahipeaud returns to Abidjan and is called upon by Angénor and other members of his former FESCI administration to create the *Mouvement des Anciens Responsables de la FESCI* (MARFES) which explores opportunities for the emerging generation of politically interested intellectuals such as themselves in a new political landscape. MARFES soon breaks up between those like Ahipeaud who take the side of General Guéï and those, like Angénor who follow the main opposition figure, the leader of the socialist party FPI, Laurent Gbagbo, who since the 1990s has ‘marched’ alongside the protesting students. In the run-up to the elections of fall 2000, Angénor for the first time deploys the kind of militia activity that will become more important afterwards. On request he sets up a group of youngsters who guarantee the security of a ‘boss’ of the Abidjan section of Gbagbo’s FPI party during his public appearances. This ad hoc unit disbands as soon as Gbagbo wins the elections, but two years later, after the coup d’état of 2002, Angénor puts up a similar organization on a much larger scale.

Between the installation of Gbagbo as president in late 2000 and the coup d’état of September 2002, Angénor witnesses the return of his FESCI age-mates Charles Groguhet and Touré Moussé Zéguen from (Europe that has brought them neither money nor diplomas). On return, they hope to enter a Côte d’Ivoire which will honour the heroes

4 The fragments of historical reconstruction that are narrated in the present tense are indented.

5 On the Ivorian student diaspora to Europe in the mid-1990s, see Arnaut (2004).

of the early struggle for democracy which has finally brought Laurent Gbagbo to power, but such is not the case. While begging for attention from the Gbagbo entourage, the two returnees – like so many others – seek ways to re-occupy a certain position in Ivorian political society, not least as a step towards a steady job or access to an otherwise regular income.⁶ Again the FESCI is used as a springboard and the three *compagnons de route* create the MIAF, the *Mouvement International des Anciens de la FESCI*, with Zégouen as president, and Grogouhet and Angénor as his deputies. Like MARFES, MIAF does not achieve very much, but it keeps together a troika which after the September 2002 coup d'état decides to create the GPP. This is not to say that the creation of the GPP is an exclusive affair among three comrades age-mates. Its creation is discussed (a) with former FESCI secretary-general Eugène Djué who soon decides to create his own paramilitary structure, the *Union pour la Libération Totale de la Côte d'Ivoire* (UPLTCI) and (b) with Charles Blé Goudé, leader of the COJEP (*Congrès Panafricain des Jeunes Patriotes*) who is presently imposing himself as paramount leader of the patriotic youth movement (*l'Alliance des Jeunes Patriotes*). For this reason Blé Goudé chooses not to join the GPP but instead, according to Angénor, manages to secure some initial funding for the GPP from his contacts at the socialist party headquarters and at the presidential palace. This latent need for FPI goodwill (and cash) is also the reason, according to Angénor, that the troika decides to put Charles Grogouhet forward as president of the GPP because Grogouhet's family is well-known for its FPI enthusiasm. Zégouen becomes his deputy and Angénor chooses for himself the function of secretary-general.

What can we make of this short story that spans 12 years of youth militancy in the vicinity of Angénor Drogban? The least one can say is that the FESCI and the GPP are connected through an 'old boys' network that appears to be a constant source of initiative and political and military-political entrepreneurship. The question as to the relative share of the 'political' and the 'military' dimensions of the GPP activity, is an intricate one and can further be elucidated by showing (a) that until recently the GPP was deeply embedded in the patriotic civil society and (b) how, since its creation in 1990, the student union FESCI has been a civil society organisation which possessed its own militaristic organisation. I start with the former.

The GPP can be regarded as a civil society initiative when it was created under Grogouhet and that remained so when Zégouen took over in late 2003. Somewhat later the organisation became member of the *Coalition Nationale des Résistants de Côte d'Ivoire* (CONARECI) – the federation of patriotic organisations led by former member of the FESCI leadership and ex-president of the youth section of the FPI, Damana Pickass. The latter tried to counterbalance the power of another potent federation, the aforementioned *Alliance des Jeunes Patriotes* headed by Charles Blé Goudé. More importantly, the GPP retained its civil society profile also after August 2004 when Zégouen was replaced by the former publicity agent Bouazo Yoko Yoko Bernard. Like his predecessors he was a civil society figure who,

6 The career of former FESCI leader and prominent patriotic militia leader 'Marshall' Eugène Djué illustrates this well. His many years of political militancy (see Arnaut 2006) appears to be dwindling since he has secured for himself a more or less regular income from a Hevea plantation in the interior of the country.

at the time of the September 2002 insurgency, was running an NGO called *Volontaires pour le Développement de la République de Côte d'Ivoire* (VDRCI) and soon after published for several months an anti-rebel weekly newspaper named *Dessagnon, le vrai informateur*. Simultaneously Bouazo co-founded the patriotic federation FONACI (*Forum National de la Société Civile d'Ivoire*) in which he himself was secretary-general, and a number of notable patriotic hardliners occupied leading posts: Dr. Ahoua Jr. – advisor of FPI ideologue and Speaker of the Ivorian National Assembly, Prof. Mamadou Koulibaly – was president while two FPI MPs Attéby Williams and Onko Marcel shared the vice-presidency. This shows how for many years the GPP and its leaders were well-connected in different strands of the 'patriotic' civil society. Only in recent times, when the peace process arrived into its final stages after the Ouagadougou Peace Accord of March 2007, did the GPP publicise its identity as a paramilitary organisation. In mid-2007 the GPP co-founded the federation of southern militias, the *Union des Mouvements d'Autodéfense du Sud* (UMAS) with Bouazo as vice-president and Jimmy Willy, 'general' of the urban militia GCLCI (*Groupeement des Combattants pour la Libération de la Côte d'Ivoire*) as president. The UMAS has the explicit goal of acting as main interlocutor with the regular army leadership as well as the international community in the demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration programmes.

Taken together, it can be argued that the GPP sought to influence the political processes in Côte d'Ivoire and to that end decided on using violence, or the threat of violence as one of its weapons. In this, it did not differ radically from its antecedent, the student union FESCI which since its early days, had conducted limited paramilitary activity alongside its public performances. At the time when Ahipeaud was secretary-general (1990-1993) this parallel activity took place in the heart of the FESCI national executive committee, more particularly in collaboration with those who were responsible for the organisation, such as the aforementioned Charles Groguehet and Touré Moussa Zéguen. In contrast to the GPP, the commando-style activity of the FESCI was partly conducted surreptitiously by people who were not official members of the FESCI national administration, such as the person called 'La main noire'.⁷ Although the precise content of this paramilitary activity is difficult to identify, several interlocutors claim that it afterwards remained part of FESCI and even became more prominent to the extent of almost becoming the FESCI's principal activity between 2000 and 2006.⁸ That is when 'les enfants de la balle' saw the light of day, when the FESCI unionists were type cast as the thugs of the patriotic movement – and much the same was true for the GPP militiamen and women.

It is one of the standard phrases, not only among GPP members themselves but also among observers that the GPP militia is the armed wing of the patriotic movement; that the latter consists of a section that talks and a section that fights. Such polarisation,

7 'La main noire' is now a well-to-do director of a publicity firm in Abidjan. In the early 1990s as an envoy of the FESCI he sought the advice and support of military leaders in West-Africa such as Charles Taylor of Liberia and Jerry Rawlings of Ghana. Using this experience after his time in the FESCI he started an international security firm.

8 About two years ago, the present president of the FESCI, Augustin Mian took it upon himself to return to the FESCI's core business of defending students' interests. However, in the run up to the 2008/2009 elections, the politicization and militarization of the student union seems difficult to hold back.

I suggest, is not helpful. The GPP milita activity should rather be seen as deeply intertwined with the other patriotic activities of mass mobilisation and demonstration. After all, the linchpin of the mass-based populist politics of the patriotic galaxy is the physical presence of people in the public space. One member of the GPP expressed it as follows:

“Ceux qui parlent là, ils se basent sur, hein, les gens parce que, je prends un exemple, quand Blé Goudé dit: sortez mais hé c’est nous nous qui sommes dans [...], qui sortons. Si on sort comme ça là c’est nous qui faisons la politique” (Marie Djoudjou 20-03-2008).

In southern Côte d’Ivoire and more particularly in Abidjan patriotic mobilisation was effected with a mixture of consensus and coercion (in terms of Gramsci), of ‘power’ and ‘violence’ (in terms of Arendt), or of ‘communicative power’ and ‘administrative power’ (in terms of Habermas) (see Ladrière 1992; Dahou 2005). In this, as will also be further substantiated in this paper, militias like the GPP played a role in the conflict-ridden public sphere on both sides of the consensus-coercion divide: (a) they set an example by showing people how to occupy public space, and even incited people to do so as part of the prime patriotic commitment which the GPP militiamen and women embody, and (b) they sometimes and in some places created a situation of insecurity for those who refused to participate in the patriotic public events while guaranteeing the security of those who did.

Stated otherwise, the GPP operated both in the push and pull factors of patriotic public mobilisation with a combination of methods of coercion and consensus. Allegedly, the basis of this *modus operandi* in the public sphere is a military training in which the apprentices acquire competencies that hover between what Arendt calls ‘power’ and ‘violence’ and which command respect as much as inspire fear. This is how a GPP ‘colonel major’ explains:

“On apprend, comment dirais-je, dans l’armée on appelle ça le FCB c’est-à-dire Formation Commune de Base, par exemple l’essentiel donc, euh [...] donc on apprend les éléments la salutation c’est-à-dire l’ordre serré, garde à vous, alignement, tout, on leur apprend à saluer, à se soumettre, à être assujettis aux supérieurs, savoir s’aligner comme ça se fait dans l’armée, c’est cette petite formation là” (Zadi Bi Laurent 20-03-2008).

In sum, the mobility of political participation and nation-building of the GPP is one of marching and rallying, of standing in line and keeping rank, of the occupation and repartition of the public sphere and of really-existing, pedestrian democracies in which voting with one’s feet is as important as voting with one’s hands. Using these basic understandings, we can explore the history of the GPP somewhat further.

A short history of the GPP – the making of an urban militia (2002-2008)

“Tous se font discrets. Et pourtant, ils sont là, ces ‘jeunes coureurs’ au crâne rasé qui circulaient par cohorte au plus fort du conflit, dans les rues d’Abidjan, ceinturon en main, arborant treillis militaires et se réclamant des groupes d’auto-défense politiques” (*Le Répère* 9/3/2008).

Soon after its creation at the turn of the year 2002/2003, the GPP rapidly becomes a success. By the time Côte d’Ivoire commemorates the first anniversary of the rebellion in September 2003, Charles Groguhet is a special invitee at ‘La Sorbonne’ – one of the foremost people’s parliaments and prestigious venue of ‘patriotic’ mobilisation, situated in Plateau, the administrative and political centre of Abidjan. In his speech Groguhet indicates his political standing by further developing the theme ‘On est fatigué!’ which president Gbagbo has launched the day before. At the same time, in the public park just outside *La Sorbonne*, a delegation of about fifty GPP troops wearing T-shirts saying ‘Nouvelles Forces’, are doing exercises. They stand in line, they march in columns, do push-ups, shout or chant.

When speaking about this early period, GPP ‘general’ General Sancho (GS) explains to me (K) below that indeed military parading was one of the organisation’s main weapons.

GS: Dans le temps c’était du volontarisme. C’est que les volontaires. Je viens, je t’appelle dans le mouvement: viens mon ami on va combattre les mouvements qui viennent d’être nés. Est-ce que tu es prêt? En retour il n’y a rien. La seule récompense que tu auras c’est la libération de ton pays. On a pas de subventions, on a pas de financiers. Non tu te débrouilles toi-même. Est-ce que tu es prêt? C’était comme ça. [...] Je ne sais pas si tu connais bien parce que un *pas-gym* c’est un mot militaire, le *pas-gym* c’est courir ensemble, quitter à Abobo pour aller jusqu’à Yopougon ou alors d’Abobo aller à Aléfé

K: En chantant?

GS: Oui

K: J’ai vu ça à Blokosso: les policiers. C’est quel mot encore?⁹

GS: Le *pas-gym*. Non écoute, on faisait ça c’était l’arme fatale de ce mouvement, c’est qu’on le faisait pour juste dissuader pour dire qu’il y avait des gens qui s’étaient réveillés à Abidjan et qui attendaient les rebelles. C’est ce qu’aujourd’hui a freiné la rébellion à entrer à Abidjan, voilà ce mouvement là [...]

K: c’est-à-dire cette présence publique

9 Blokosso – a contamination of ‘Blockhaus’ and the Dyula word – so (neighbourhood/quarter) – is a small town quarter situated at the outskirts of the commune of Cocody, along the Abidjan laguna. Blokosso neighbours the presidential residence at Cocody and because of this strategic position, it regularly witnesses teams of police or army recruits parading through its streets often during the early hours of the day and mostly during weekends. As a regular resident of Blokosso since 2004 I have seen dozens of such parades; the first ones I saw in 2004 where the so-called *miliciens de Blé Goudé* – youngsters who, after an appeal by Blé Goudé, had applied for membership of the regular army and pending the decision of their acceptance, organised their own training among which, conspicuous ‘pas-gym’ sessions in Cocody.

GS: Jusqu'à ce que l'opinion internationale parle: c'est des gaillards, ils sont prêts [...] souvent on avait des renseignements généraux qui arrivaient même pour aller dénoncer certaines personnes qui avaient des idées tordues vis-à-vis de la crise, qu'on [...] rapportait à la police; ah on a des renseignements, il y a un gars suspect là-bas. Au fait on faisait un peu la police, la sécurité de personnes et puis de tout le monde

From this and the other interviews, one can provisionally complete the picture.

During the first year of GPP existence, the organisation spread its activities over the whole of the Abidjan metropolitan area, both its centres and peripheries. On the outskirts of the northern Abidjan commune of Abobo the GPP had a training ground where new recruits were given their basic training (see FCB above). Apart from that, they marched and walked around in Abobo which was considered as infested with pro-rebel 'northerners', as well as in other communes such as Cocody and Yopougon. The loud marching, ('pas-gym') was the military public relations activity par excellence conducted by groups of young men in uniform (T-shirts) who tried to show that they were capable of counter-acting any rebel activity in the city. In contrast, the walking, the ambulant surveillance, was done individually or in small groups dressed in plain clothes who could often rely on a network of 'cabines' (roadside mobile phone operators) for communication amongst themselves and with the GPP headquarters. After their daily activity the GPP members went home and dispersed throughout Abidjan.

Taken together, the GPP occupied the urban public space both conspicuously and inconspicuously. It sent images of defiance ('resistance') and framed the prospect of an urban guerrilla conflict not only across the demarcation line that divides Côte d'Ivoire into two, but also across national borders. Such a message was directed to the international media and the UN headquarters.

In similar fashion, Angénor (21/03/2008) looks back on the merits of the 'early' GPP.

Certains objectifs ont été atteints quand-même. Le premier objectif c'est le problème psychologique c'est-à-dire sur le plan psychologique. L'opinion internationale voit le GPP comme une organisation très puissante (*laughs loudly*), au fond, hein, une organisation très puissante qui repose sur des milliards de francs, sur un armement sophistiqué, hors il n'y a rien. Ça c'est le premier objectif. Deuxième objectif, sur le plan sécuritaire les choses ont marché parce que beaucoup de jeunes du GPP ont travaillé dans-aux côtés des FDS [Forces de Défense et de Sécurité]. Ils sont allés à l'Ouest, même parce que les premiers, les premiers qui sont allés à l'Ouest sont des éléments du GPP, c'est-à-dire avant même qu'on le donne le mot d'ordre. C'est après qu'il y a eu création de l'FLGO ça c'est un autre débat, ça c'est des gens qui ont fait des groupes sollicités, sinon le GPP n'a pas été sollicité rien que par moi ma conception je n'ai pas eu besoin de quelque chose parce que ... je fais ce que j'ai envie de faire.¹⁰

10 The FLGO, Forces de Liberation du Grand Ouest, is a militia which has been operating in the Western part of Côte d'Ivoire under the leadership of 'general' Denis Maho Glofiei. Also according to Maho Glofiei himself

The above quote confirms and even highlights the main points which General Sancho made earlier. The overall picture is that of a youth militia which through its commanding bodily presence in Abidjan public space astonishes not only the urbanites but also its friends and foes far beyond the limits of the city and the country. Most interesting is that this way of operating in the city is connected with ideas of mobility, freedom and (financial) autonomy. Along these lines, one can tell the story of the further development of the GPP after the initial period.

September 2003 was not only a moment of glory for the GPP, it was also a turning point. While Groguhet was giving his rip-roaring speech at *La Sorbonne*, his second in command Zéguen was trying to oust him. At the same time, the Ivorian prime minister Seydou Diarra was trying to convince the FDS to enforce the ban on the GPP which he had proclaimed already in August 2003. One month later the GPP was already more of a 'militia': it operated in the shadows of a shattered state, it was outlawed but tolerated, and considered dangerous as much for its training and arms as for its fanaticism. More importantly perhaps, with the departure of Groguhet and the arrival of Zéguen, the GPP replaced an orator with someone who eagerly pursued the logic of 'milicianisation' and gradually chose a more military format for the GPP.

One of the main features of this militia-option was the end of dispersal in the urban space by the regrouping of GPP troops into camps – the first one being the *Institut Marie Thérèse Houphouët-Boigny* at Adjamé. This was the beginning of a fragmentation of the GPP in several camps in different parts of Abidjan – Azito (Yopougon), Palm Beach (Vridi), Akwaba (Vridi), and Adjouffou to name only a few. This fragmentation went hand in hand with the proliferation of 'generals' (basically camp commanders) such as Jeff Fada, Ato Belly, Josué, Roger Njabei, and others. This process of 'cantonnement' signalled the further transformation of the GPP in terms of mobility and financial autonomy. With regard to mobility, the camp-dwelling militiamen and women either stayed in the camp or in its vicinity where they easily started preying on the local population, most typically, the small merchants and local taxi-drivers. Although this income may have helped individual members, it was not sufficient to run the camp. Hence the 'generals' and their 'colonels' were constantly in need of money to maintain the basic infrastructure of the camp (water, electricity, and possibly some food) as well as to keep up a certain status as 'general' themselves. This money was found among a multitude of structural and occasional sponsors: businessmen, political big men, ministers, the prime minister's office and the presidential palace, and also customers who would pay for small security jobs or drugs transports undertaken by GPP members.

Thus, already by 2004 the overall picture was that of a GPP which was gradually evacuating large sections of the urban public sphere and, through fragmentation and localisation, lost both its 'political' mobility and relative autonomy. From an imaginary 'infantry' of incalculable and hence alarming magnitude, the GPP was being reduced to a collection of localisable units consisting of countable individual militiamen and women. From 2005,

(interview of 13/06/2008) he and other 'cadres' of the western region in accord with president Gbagbo and the loyalist army forces set up the militia and recruited youngsters from the region.

when prime minister Charles Konan Banny took over from Diarra, this process was even reinforced by the logic of disarmament which demanded that militiamen and women were identified, counted and traceable. But, as Secretary-general Angénor was eager to point out: initially there was no-one to disarm, there were no arms to begin with. This, however did change. From the time of Zéguen and into the reign of Boazo Yoko Yoko Bernard, the present president of the GPP, arms had been entering the GPP albeit in relatively small quantities. That in urban Côte d'Ivoire the disarmament of the militias went hand in hand with their (reluctant) arming, serves as a stark illustration of the extent to which the 'militianisation' was a self-fulfilling prophecy which the GPP was basically unable to resist.

Concluding remarks: mobility and belonging in pedestrian politics

“Le président préside, le parlement parlemente et la rue se rue”
(Eugène Djué, *L'intelligent d'Abidjan*, 4/3/2005).

The bulk of this paper is a historical reconstruction of the creation and transformation of the GPP from what I have called a 'ludus pro patria' perspective. This perspective highlights the bodily presence of the militiamen and women in the Abidjan urban space as indexing political commitment. In this paper the main analytical focus has been on deconstructing the concept of 'militianisation' as the contingent outcome of a complex interplay of the appropriation of a civil society initiative (a) by national elites who insinuated the GPP through sponsoring and patronage as well as (b) by national and international actors who contributed in a self-fulfilling way to shaping the GPP according to the format of a standard 'militia'. In terms of the approach developed here 'militianisation' for the GPP meant its fragmentation and 'localization' together with the decline of its character as an ephemeral, agile, omnipresent and imposing youth force. This went hand in hand with the shattering of the GPP's deceptive public image as being a populous, heavily armed and well-trained hence threatening organisation. Stated simply: the GPP was the victim of its PR-success.

Apart from enabling a critical examination of the 'militianisation' process, the perspective developed in this paper aspires to develop a critical perspective on at least two central aspects of the (urban) militias in Côte d'Ivoire and beyond, namely their mobility and their quest for belonging. In a recent report Richards and Chauveau (2007) address this issue head-on by establishing a link between both. They argue that the social and economic hyper-mobility of West-African youngsters makes them available for recruitment as militiamen and women. What makes this observation all the more relevant is the fact that in Côte d'Ivoire the military, inversionary projects of the last eight years (both by 'rebels' and 'patriots') can be seen as attempts to offer the younger generation prospects for reducing their hyper-mobility by facilitating access to land and jobs (see e.g. Chauveau & Richards 2008). Conceivably, this paper has sufficiently shown that the discursive/performative angle from which the 'ludus pro patria' perspective looks at mobility and belonging differs from the more socio-economic perspective of Richards and Chauveau – but could help to gain additional insights.

To start with mobility, it is clear that the hyper-mobility of the Ivorian youngsters both in rural and in urban areas – and indeed on a rural-urban continuum (see Mkandawire 2002; Murunga (2006) – is signified as negative mobility, in the way Bauman (1998: 96-97) defines ‘vagabonds’ in opposition to ‘tourists’. While the latter move around the globe as they wish, vagabonds relocate out of necessity, as the subjects of push and pull factors beyond their control, or as Richards and Chauveau (2007) have it, as footloose, jobless and landless youngsters. In contrast, by highlighting the strategic dimension of the GPP’s urban mobility, its ‘motoricity’ if you like, this paper tries to demonstrate that the militant ‘patriotic’ youngsters in the Ivorian conflict were somehow able to manage and deploy their own mobility, albeit for only a short time, but were indeed unable to resist the ‘localization’ which the process of ‘milicianisation’ brought with it. Although this ‘tourist’ type of mobility can be observed in violent military projects elsewhere (Debos 2008), Diouf (2003) has shown how it can be taken into consideration in discursive/performative analyses of youth manifestations in the public sphere. Applied to the Ivorian ‘young patriots’, it becomes clear how the bodily co-presence of youngsters in Abidjan public spaces both in a static and a mobile way – respectively in people’s parliaments and (mass) demonstrations – has contributed to the symbolisation of ‘patriotic’ defiance (‘resistance’) and (exclusionist) identity (see Arnaut 2008). This brings me to two final points about belonging.

The first point concerns national belonging and the fact that the GPP in its ‘armoured’ athletic public performances has been playing a central role in visualizing/materializing/embodying the youth metaphor that dominated the political and military discourse of the Ivorian ‘patriots’. This metaphor was based on the idea of the rejuvenation or the re-generation of the nation that was to be realized by its youngsters (see Arnaut 2004; Banégas 2007). In an entirely different context, Hobsbawm has made a similar observation:

“What has made sport so uniquely effective a medium for inculcating national feelings, at all events for males, is the ease with which the least political or public individuals can identify with the nation as symbolized by young persons excelling at what practically every man wants [...]. The imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people” (Hobsbawm 1990: 143).

In the Ivorian case, the political efficiency of this metaphor of rejuvenation of the nation cannot be overestimated. For one, it was heavily leaned upon by political entrepreneurs such as Charles Blé Goudé in order to ‘sell’ the Ouagadougou peace accords of March 2007 among the young patriots. Although the latter had for years been demanding, and in the most explicit terms, the total destruction of the rebels, Blé Goudé succeeded in convincing a ‘patriotic’ public to accept reconciliation with the rebels as ‘children’ and ‘youngsters’ of the ‘emerging’ Ivorian nation.

The second point about belonging concerns the fact that the urban militias shaped new contexts and spaces of socialization. This, I submit, made the GPP members de-

velop a sense of belonging in a city which was not only conceived as the axis of the nation but also as the national hub to the rest of the world, to the international media, public opinion and the UN headquarters. In a similar vein as Simone (2001) and Bauder (2001) before him, Diouf observed that:

“young Africans construct places of socialization and new sociabilities whose function is to show their difference, either on the margins of society or at its heart, simultaneously as victims and active agents, and circulating in a *geography that escapes the limits of the national territory* (Diouf 2003: 5; my emphasis).

The new ‘glocal’ spaces of socialization that the conflict in Côte d’Ivoire has given birth to are of many different sorts and include, apart from the people’s parliaments and the so-called ‘grins’ (see Atchoua 2008), also the different GPP subdivisions or regiments, as well as the many temporary organisations such as the training camps or the group excursions to GPP members in other cities. These spaces of course also include the camps in their different forms: the relatively closed camps where GPP members dwell day and night or the other more open ones. The latter have become more popular over the last two years. There, militiamen and women pass through to share information, analyze events on the military and political front, or just to have a drink or a meal together. At this very moment, all these camps are the locus of hope and despair (about disarmament, reintegration and ultimately money, jobs and families). However, few GPP members lack the conviction that whatever the outcome, they had an enriching social experience which at the same time has changed the course of events not only on a national but also on an international level. In sum, as an urban youth ‘movement’ the GPP has contributed to the reinvention of Ivorian youth as glocal citizens.

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